

Best Practices for Educational Research

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Intended audience: Student researchers in graduate and undergraduate programs at Saint Mary's University of Minnesota and their faculty research advisors

General tips

1. Complete the required CITI training before you start your application, which gives a good background to the field of research ethics and the regulatory requirements.
2. Understand situational vulnerabilities common to education research, such as the teacher's position of authority in the classroom or the effects of peer pressure.
3. One of the main goals of ethical research is to answer the research question with as little risk to the human subjects as possible, and to minimize risks that cannot be avoided. Risk can be present in the study design, the procedures, the topic, or in certain situations.
 - a. Study design - Some study designs present risk in an educational setting. For example, if the goal is to conduct one-on-one interviews about a sensitive topic, it may be very difficult to discreetly remove someone from their scheduled class or activity without drawing the attention of others. The subject's right to privacy would be difficult to maintain if others knew of their involvement in a study about a particular sensitive topic.
 - b. Limitations to anonymity in a small school - If your survey doesn't collect names, but does collect age, gender, and race, is it possible for you to figure out whose answers are whose?
4. Know some topics that are sensitive in a professional setting - Think about the risks of data being accidentally disclosed. What could happen to the subjects? Would they face professional consequences? Would they face social consequences?
5. The IRB isn't looking for perfectly benign, risk-free studies. They are looking for clear, articulate applications that show that you (the Primary Investigator) have thought about all of the possible risks and have a plan to mitigate these risks.

Frequently Asked Questions

Do I need to submit a Research Cooperation Agreement (RCA) or an IRB Authorization Agreement? What's the difference?

If you are recruiting participants through a school, club, organization, or group, you need to show you have the proper permission to do so. If there is another IRB involved (common when recruiting from another college or university) you would use an Authorization Agreement. If you are

recruiting from a school district, they might have a research office, but probably not a formal IRB. In that case, use an RCA.

Note that when you fill out the RCA, there are three checkboxes that describe different permissions the school/organization can grant you. Not all apply to every study. Be sure to read each one and select only those that apply to your project. For example, if you are doing a survey and don't plan to use any archival data (grades, attendance records, etc.), don't select the checkbox for archival data usage. The checkboxes should help you explain to the organization what your study involves and what they are agreeing to let you do.

If I need my school district's approval, why do I also need the IRB's approval?

An IRB makes sure the studies that involve human subjects are done ethically. The school district gives permission for you to conduct that study using their students. Both are necessary for conducting academic research responsibly.

Why does the application ask about potential benefits to the participants? How do I answer that question?

- In social-behavioral research, there are usually no direct benefits to the participants for doing things like questionnaires or surveys, even if the research results in useful knowledge for their field. However, in some situations, your research may provide the subjects with benefits merely by participating. For example, participating in a focus group in which subjects have the opportunity to air concerns about a particular aspect of their job and learn from others could be a benefit you identify as a likely part of the project.
- Make sure your answer to this question is consistent with the statement on the consent form about benefits to the participants.

If you have any questions about IRB processes, applications, forms, documents, etc. please don't hesitate to reach out to the IRB Coordinator or an IRB member. We can help answer questions while you're working on your application, even before you submit.

Website:

<https://irb.smumn.edu/>

Contact info:

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